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# **Reality Television Portrayals of Kavos: Tourists Behaving Badly**

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## **Abstract**

Reality television programmes are an increasingly ubiquitous element of popular culture. While other forms of popular culture's impact on tourists' perceptions of destination image have been considered in the extant literature, the impact of reality television is under-researched. This article provides a qualitative thematic analysis of televisual media portrayals of the tourist destination of Kavos, on the Greek island of Corfu, whose economy is almost solely reliant upon an increasingly short high summer season. Reality television portrayals of tourist behavior have generated negative publicity about the resort's image that may negatively affect potential tourists' perceptions of Kavos as a destination.

**Keywords:** destination image; reality television; Kavos; British tourists

## **Reality Television - Tourists Behaving Badly**

### **Introduction**

Tourism as escape from the day to day remains 'central to most forms of tourist experience' (Williams & Lew, 2015:12). Wang (1999:363) proposed that tourist motivations can involve self-making and self-identity, particularly for individuals who 'cannot realize their authentic selves in everyday life'. Young tourists may find such realisation constraints brought about through relatively close parental supervision, and additional opportunities brought about by the amount of free time available to party whilst on holiday compared to when they are at home (Konstantinos, 2010). Reports in Greek and British newspapers based on the behaviour of young British tourists on Club 18-30 holidays in Greek island resorts have been overwhelmingly 'disapproving and moralising tone' (Konstantinos, 2010). The popular destination of Kavos, once a relatively unspoilt fishing village at the far southern tip of the Greek island of Corfu, is now perceived as a hedonistic summer party destination particularly for young British tourists, and the Kavos economy is almost solely reliant upon an increasingly short high summer tourist season when these young people are free particularly from full-time education commitments. Four different series of reality television programmes, that have to a greater or lesser extent included a focus on Kavos, have all concentrated their attention on images of extremes of behaviour of this particular tourist demographic. Since the airing on British television of these programmes the destination image of Kavos is increasingly perceived as negative (Bastakis, Buhalis & Butler, 2004; Kamenidou, Mamalis, Kokkinis & Geranis, 2013). Kavos thus finds itself in a group of such destinations that are 'in a difficult to reverse position' given the type of tourism they are attracting that have 'spoiled heavily their image and reputation' (Bastakis *et al.*, 2004). One study based on questionnaires and interviews in resort with British tourists holidaying in Kavos in the high summer season of 2011 has described the resort as a 'wild destination', 'with intense night life and clubbing' and tourist experiences involving 'excessive drinking,

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drug use, risk sex behaviors and many times the consequences are injuries, accidents, vandalism, fights, assaults, and even deaths' (Kamenidou *et al.*, 2013:100-102).

The purpose of this paper is to provide an analysis of the destination image of Kavos according to the content of these reality TV programmes. This study therefore continues and further contributes to the development of theoretical understanding about the relationship between various forms of popular culture and destination image particularly regarding reality televisual portrayals of popular tourist destinations. Our focus on the way media can present a destination in a way that may lead to a negative image being perceived, contributes to an under-developed area in the literature on media-induced tourism. In particular, the contribution of this research has been to further the development of theoretical understanding about the relationship between reality television as a form of popular culture and destination image that has been previously been lacking in the literature.

The paper's structure is based on an introduction to the concepts under investigation. This is followed by a review of relevant literature. We then present and defend the methodological approach taken. Findings are then presented, and summarised. These findings are then discussed in light of the literature. Our conclusion highlights the original contribution this paper has made, and also considers the limitations of this study and suggested areas for further research.

In undertaking this research we have employed a highly qualitative methodology, thematically analysing the textual content of each episode of these television programmes. In order to provide a relevant theoretical basis to this paper, first we will review the literature on destination image and media induced tourism. We then provide insights into the relatively

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recent, but growing phenomenon that is reality television, because reality television is indeed a different phenomenon to, for example, drama or documentary, and therefore believe that such a discussion provides a more specific underpinning for this paper that points out the way reality television has so far been largely ignored by researchers of destination image and media induced tourism. We then present and defend the use of the highly qualitative, and indeed some may claim overly subjective, methodological approach we have used to thematically analyse our data, before presenting our findings. Our findings have been presented firstly programme-by-programme, and this section of our paper concludes with a summary of the key themes arising from our overall analysis. The discussion of our findings highlights the differences between reality television and other forms of media. The findings are thus indeed new and provide a contribution to furthering academic and practitioner understanding of the way different forms of visual media can contribute to destination image formation. Because of the contrived nature of reality television programmes, they do not show the place as a year-round location where people live and work, nor do they portray the broader reality of what really happens in these places even at the height of the season when not all young tourists behave in the extreme ways that make for sensationalised television. Our conclusion therefore highlights our original contribution to knowledge that such reality television portrayals of youth-targeted ‘party’ destinations such as Kavos are highly contrived by those responsible for making these programmes, but are consumed as ‘reality’ by many audiences, and are also consumed differently than travelogues and other documentaries that purport to portray a place’s reality, or fictionalised dramas that use a place only as a location backdrop to the programme itself.

### DESTINATION IMAGE AND MEDIA INDUCED TOURISM

One of the first theories of image formation was proposed by Gunn (1972) who differentiated between *Organic images* (arising from unbiased external sources), *Induced images* (derived from marketing and promotional material emanating from the destination) and *Modified-Induced images* (following first-hand experience of the destination). Fakeye and Crompton (1991) similarly identify three stages of image formation linked to such sources, although they define the final stage as the *Complex image*. As the terms used by various authors to refer to each of these image formation stages and sources can be confusing dependent upon which cited source is used, as various authors have unpacked and labelled the various information sources somewhat differently (notably Gartner, 1993; and Echtner and Ritchie, 1991) this article will use the terms relating to the three main sources and stages of image formation consistent with Fakeye and Crompton (1991). This paper is not concerned with *Induced images*, rather, a focus on reality television portrayals of a destination, would fall under the category of *Organic Image* source materials. There is some reference to the *Complex Image* formed from first-hand experience of the destination, as all the television programmes we include in our study show tourists on holiday in-resort.

The tourism literature has long recognised that a destination's image has an effect on the tourist's decision process (Hyounggon & Richardson, 2003), and on tourists' perceptions of places (Lawson & Baud-Bovy, 1977). 'Image formation is defined as a construction of a mental representation of a destination on the basis of information cues delivered by the image formation agents and selected by a person' (Tasci & Gartner, 2007:415).

Destination image is defined as 'the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination' (Crompton, 1979:18) and destination image serves as cues and guidance for

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tourists and can help with the decision making process when choosing and purchasing a holiday (Morgan & Pritchard, 1998). The tourist industry is a highly competitive market with many different product offerings for the consumer to choose from. Purchasing a holiday often entails a high degree of involvement and risk for the individual as they will invest time, money and emotion into this process (Blackwell, Miniard & Engel, 2005). Individuals will utilise a variety of media sources and discussions with friends and family to gain a greater understanding of a destination (Brayshaw, 1995). Therefore, it is crucial that a resort, destination, location or country creates the right image when promoting themselves to prospective tourists (Morgan & Pritchard, 1998). However, destination images are not only *Induced* by those charged with the formal task of promoting and encouraging tourism, but are also created through other *Organic* sources like friends, family, and media such as film, television, literary works and online media. Moreover, it is not only tourists and potential tourists who consume such destination images. Particularly with regard to destination images from various forms of visual, textual and symbolic media representations (Iwashita, 2006), film and television audiences may consume destination images as entertainment, or may come across image formation information in newspapers, and via social media platforms. Even when state-sponsored or DMO-sponsored messages may be found in these portrayals, (notably, for example, when a nation's Film Board or other similar body provides inducements for a feature film or TV programme to be located in the destination) the actual representation of the destination usually remains in the control of the production company.

Karpovich (2010:9-10) identifies that 'the funeral in 1926 of film star Rudolph Valentino, 'reportedly attended by close to 100,000 fans' can be seen as 'one of the earliest recorded examples of the significance of film as an entirely distinct and purposeful motivation for travel'. Disneyland, opening in 1955, also provided a tourist experience associated with the

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film output of the Disney studio, as did the airline El Al's 'organised tour of the locations used for the filming of Exodus', and a growth in academic interest in the mid-1990s led to the recognition of 'film-motivated tourism as a distinct field of enquiry'. Broadening the academic approach to consider other forms of media, Busby and Klug (2001:316) now define 'media-induced tourism' as that which 'involves visits to places celebrated for associations with books, authors, television programmes and films'. 'Films, television programmes, and literature have an excellent ability to lead people to a strong interest in a destination by providing them with such imagery, memories, myths, icons, and emotions' (Iwashita, 2006:63), can influence travel preferences, and indeed, as a promotional method 'have become a catalyst for tourism in contemporary globalised media-saturated society' (Iwashita, 2003:332). As a result, a number of studies have analysed the effects of such media-induced tourism, but, in the main, this research has tended to lean more toward its positive effects (Beeton, 2005; Busby & Klug, 2001; Hudson & Ritchie, 2006; Skinner, 2016; Spears, Josiam, Kinley & Pookulangara, 2012). Although Lichrou, O'Malley and Patterson (2008:33) recognise that 'popular culture can be seen as a medium for the construction of places in the tourists' minds', with television being stated as one such form of popular culture, there is little research related to the effects of a destination's portrayal in reality television programmes at all, and little in the general literature on media-induced tourism that considers any negative effects these programmes may have on the image of a destination.

## **REALITY TELEVISION**

Televisual media content 'can reproduce or counter misapprehensions of place' (McElroy, 2011:176). For a destination such as Kavos where negative and pejorative reports on tourist behaviour have regularly been printed in the press, television programmes focusing on tourists behaving badly in the resort can therefore increase the possibility of the consumers of



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such media perceiving the destination in a negative light. However, both as a medium and as a technology, television 'is undergoing a spatial turn of its own on various levels. Television texts today migrate from one screen to another and from platform to platform ... as media content is subject to a "space shift" ... and no longer confined to a "box" in the living room' (Shagrir, 2015). Much televisual media content is also now freely (if not always legally) available via the internet, which itself is already increasingly becoming a strong influencing factor on tourists' decisions about destinations (Alonso & Bea, 2012).

One type of televisual media content that is under-researched is that of the Reality Television programme. There are many different genres of Reality Television including, documentary style programmes featuring celebrities (such as *Keeping up with The Kardashians* or *The Osbournes*), special living environments (*Big Brother*, *Jersey Shore*), professional activities (*Miami Ink*) and sub-cultures (*The Undateables*), reality legal programmes (*Judge Judy*), reality competition game shows (*Britain's Got Talent*, and *X-Factor*), and self-improvement programmes (*The Biggest Loser*). Nabi, Biely, Morgan and Stitt (2003:304) define reality television as 'programs that film real people as they live out events (contrived or otherwise) in their lives, as these events occur', thus blurring the lines between destination image on TV as documentary or as entertainment, although Dunn (2005) even questions the 'authenticity' of the way places are portrayed in more traditional documentary / entertainment style travel / holiday programmes on television. The term 'documentary' is attributed to film-maker John Grierson who defined documentary as 'the creative treatment of reality' (Winston, 2008). Gilhespy and Harris (2011:53) claim that 'documentary film belongs to a discourse that claims to describe the real and to offer insights into the truth', while also warning that editorial inputs into the way such reality is produced creatively tend to be hidden or disguised. Documentary is also at least to some extent scripted, yet differing from other

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scripted forms of televisual media such as fictional drama inasmuch that documentary retains its claim as a form that ‘offers accounts of “the real”’ (Gilhespy and Harris, 2011:54).

Nabi *et al.* (2003) stress that reality television programmes are not scripted, and therein lays the fundamental difference between this study and extant studies focusing on other types of media-induced tourism, particularly scripted films, television dramas, or documentaries. Rose and Wood (2005:284) propose that ‘the consumption of reality programming represents a sophisticated quest for authenticity within the traditionally fiction-oriented entertainment paradigm’, although they do question the ability of such consumption to provide insights into authenticity when programmes are ‘increasingly characterized by simulation’. Research has identified that whilst participants who watched reality programmes understood that the shows are probably in some way staged, participants were likely to view reality television programmes as ‘more real’ than more traditional forms of scripted television programmes and/or films (Nabi *et al.*, 2003).

As reported in the popular press, ‘the January series of What Happens in Kavos drew in 1.61m viewers, whilst on BBC Three, the most recent series of Sun, Sex and Suspicious Parents hit 1.1m viewers. TV voyeurism is compelling’ (Volpe, 2013). However, Volpe goes on to stress that it is the airing of these reality television programmes that has contributed to broadening the audience reach insofar as portraying Kavos unfavourably, based on the ‘reality’ as shown in such programmes:

*‘Most of us were blissfully ignorant as to what went on ... until luckily (or unfortunately) for us BBC Three and Channel 4 ventured into the bars, clubs and emergency clinics to follow around scores of revellers drinking, having casual sex, and generally making tits of themselves on national television’* (Volpe, 2013).

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Such is the effect of these programmes on the destination image of Kavos in the popular press that one television critic even ended his critique of the programme thus:

*'Footnote: Kavos is on the south coast of Corfu. Don't, whatever you do, go there...'*  
(O'Sullivan, 2013).

## Methodology

The focus of our research reflects the growing interest in the visual across a range of disciplines, especially tourism, where the inclusion of such methods is relatively recent due to both 'the increasing legitimisation of qualitative research, and the willingness of tourism researchers to explore innovative approaches to research' (Rakić & Chambers, 2012:4).

Much of the extant literature on media induced tourism has been dominated by quantitative approaches that seek to statistically identify relationships and predictors in relation to its effects (; Hudson & Ritchie, 2006; Spears *et al*, 2012). Moreover, tourism studies are 'still predominantly located within business and management schools where visual methods have not been widely legitimated' (Chambers, 2012:33). Thus Skinner (2011) suggests that other qualitative approaches such as those more usually applied within the social sciences should be adopted in order to explore emerging themes within place identity formation, although recognising that such approaches may be less familiar to business and management researchers. Iwashita (2003) favours a social constructionist approach to studying place portrayals in contemporary media. This study leans heavily towards the qualitative approaches of social constructionism in the way tourism consumption practices within Kavos are portrayed in televisual media and the way such practices impact on its destination image. Konstantinos (2010) explored print media attitudes to the behaviours of young people on holiday in Club 18-30 resorts in Greece. Our study has employed a similar analysis, but of the

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content of the reality television programmes focusing on Kavos. We also take a similar line of defence as did Konstantinos (2010) in justifying our focus on this particular destination as an appropriate setting for research due to the amount of media coverage that is attracted by the behaviour of young British tourists in such Greek resorts.

Within Konstantinos' (2010) study, as with ours, the first stage was for the researchers to identify appropriate media for analysis. When considering other forms of visual media in tourism research, issues of subjectivity and objectivity tend to be associated with the visual medium that is being researched. For example, the use of tourist photographs as data, while understood to be to involve to some extent subjective action on behalf of the photographer, is often associated with positivism because similar to any machine 'the photographic camera has been understood as a scientific tool for registering reality more accurately' (Gilhespy & Harris, 2011:52). However, there is also an interesting methodological paradox regarding the way photographs are perceived:

*'Viewed as works of art, photographs are thought to embody the personal concerns of the photographer-artist ... viewed as records, photographs are thought to reproduce the reality in front of the camera's lens, yielding an unmediated and unbiased visual report' (Schwartz, 1989:120).*

Similarly, fictionalised drama as could be considered as more of a subjective portrayal of a location than a documentary about a particular place (regardless of editorial input). Whereas reality television, while claiming portrayal of the real in its epithet, is certainly recognised as being a more subjective form of visual media representation than documentary, scripted as it is in a manner more akin to fictionalised drama.

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As the purpose of this study is to provide an analysis of the destination image of Kavos according to the content of 'reality' TV programmes, we set the selection criteria that the reality programmes considered for analysis must be set in an identifiable holiday location, filmed in a documentary style giving the viewer 'fly on the wall' viewing, shown on UK television, and where none of the cast was classed as a celebrity. Thus data were gathered from these four reality programmes:

- *Greece Uncovered (GU)* - made by London Weekend Television (LWT), with 8 episodes filmed in 'party' locations around Greece, including Kavos, aired on Sky One between 9<sup>th</sup> August and 27<sup>th</sup> September 1998. It was the third of seven of the '*Uncovered*' series of programmes that in previous years focused on Ibiza and the Caribbean. Further seasons focused on Miami, Tenerife, Ibiza again, and Australia.
- *Sun, Sex and Suspicious Parents (SS&SP)* - featured young holidaymakers on their first vacation away from their parents, with the 'twist' that the parents too were in the holiday destination, secretly watching their behaviour. Aired on BBC3 between 2011-2014, Kavos was featured in Series 1 (S1) Episode 4 (Ep4) (January 25<sup>th</sup> 2011); S2 Ep3 (8<sup>th</sup> February 2012); and S3 Ep 6 (12<sup>th</sup> Feb 2013).
- *Corfu: A Tale of Two Islands (C:TOTI)* – an 8 episode programme aired on ITV in October and November 2102 that explored the life of ex-pats and holidaymakers on the island.
- *What Happens in Kavos (WHIK)* – made by Dragonfly for Channel 4. Season 1 aired in January 2013, season 2 in November and December 2013.

Similar to Konstantinos (2010) we also found that a quantitative approach to analysing the content of these media portrayals would be 'inadequate, mainly because the emphasis of this study was not to obtain data that can be counted and analysed statistically, but to fulfil the

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goals of the quest for meaning'. Thus we explored a more qualitative thematic method of analysis to understand the way reality television programmes represent the destination image of Kavos, with the aim of identifying messages, patterns and/or themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Roberts & Pettigrew, 2007) contained within these programmes, seeking phrases to provide and enhance understanding and perception of the issues (Hanson, 1992).

When considering methodological approaches to qualitative analysis, it must be recognised that such analysis is subjective. In the opinion of these authors that is simply a characteristic of qualitative research and alone does not, nor should not, belie a negative judgement about its worth. Our analysis was undertaken qualitatively, thematically, and not using any form of mechanised processes or software to assist in this analysis. Indeed, Davidson and Skinner (2010) found that there was no benefit to be gained from the use of computer aided analysis over manual analysis of various forms of qualitative data, further stressing that computer aided techniques were found to be restricted and highly limited in their utility for analysing various forms of visual data.

We therefore treated the reality television programmes comprising our dataset as subjective qualitative data, and each episode of each programme was viewed in order to ascertain the themes arising from this data. Some episodes were viewed more than once in order to check the initial analysis that had been made of its content. Some episodes were viewed again after the entire data set had been viewed and analysed to add more relevant insight into findings once the themes had arisen from the initial viewing. The number of viewings was not consistent across the entire dataset because of the subjective nature of this form of qualitative enquiry. Rather each episode was viewed the number of times as it was needed to be in order to ascertain the themes arising from the programmes overall.

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Our data set comprised each episode of the abovementioned reality television programmes, and our thematic analysis was conducted on the scripted voiceover, and participants' conversations contained within these programmes, along with a thematic analysis of the situations contrived and / or purposively chosen by the television production companies to be portrayed in each episode of each programme. Specifically, each episode was viewed at least once. Recordings of the programmes were paused as necessary to record key phrases. Thus the research process was inductive and iterative. The data drove the analysis, and themes arose from an analysis of these phrases, scrutinising the data to find meaning as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Roberts and Pettigrew (2007), and undertaken from a similar approach to that taken by Konstantinos (2010) exploring the behaviours of young tourists in Greece through an analysis of print media rather than an analysis of the televisual media we focused upon.

As explained by Fereday & Muir-Cochrane (2006:82), when employing an inductive thematic analysis, through carefully going over the data, it is possible to analyse the data to find 'themes that emerge as being important to the description of the phenomenon', these arise through 'a form of pattern recognition within the data, where emerging themes become the categories for analysis'. Thus, because our analysis was conducted inductively, we did not use any coding template that would otherwise be a feature of a deductive thematic analysis.

## **Findings**

The television programmes included in our data set were mainly targeted at UK audiences, although the 1998 *GU* programme, while made by LWT was aired on the digital channel Sky One. All of the other programmes are now available to watch via the internet, with many

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available on YouTube, which means that media audiences all around the world can see the destination image of Kavos as portrayed in these programmes.

### *Greece Uncovered*

The focus of this series was showing young British tourism workers and holidaymakers indulging in alcohol-fuelled behaviour, focusing on “*getting bollocksed*” and “*getting pissed*”, and showing extreme behaviours including drinking games, nudity and sexual behaviour. Excerpts of the voiceover of this ‘documentary’ style reality programme in episodes focusing on Kavos include that: “*Kavos is Corfu’s biggest party town, and the holiday season is getting into full swing*” (Episode 2) and that “*In Kavos every night is party night*” (Episode 6).

### *Sun, Sex and Suspicious Parents*

In Series 1 & 2, the focus of the programmes was on groups of young people around 18 years of age who had just finished high school. Series 3 Episode 6 featured 19 year olds, but also on their first holiday without parents. The voiceover to Series 1 Episode 4, set in Kavos, started as follows: “*The first ever summer holiday with your mates, a rite of passage for every teenager, freedom, temptation and excess, all away from Mum and Dad*”. The voiceover goes on to state that: “*Corfu is full of history, beautiful beaches, sophisticated yacht clubs and Kavos, where every summer young Brits descend in their thousands, in search of sun, sea, holiday romance and cheap booze*”

The voiceover for Season 2 Episode 3 again focused on aspects such as “*freedom*” and “*anything goes*”. “*The freedom of your first ever holiday with your mates, where everyone’s up for it and anything goes, cheap booze, dirty dancing, and that all-important independence*



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*away from Mum and Dad .... Coming up it's sun, sex and seriously bad behaviour in Kavos ..... party playground for young British tourists ..... the 24 hour party resort where everyone's up for it and anything goes" (S2 Ep3).* This episode then showed a group of young lads setting off a fire extinguisher in their apartment on their first day's arrival, and the next day being informed of the cost to deal with the damage (560 Euros) for what they termed a "*prank*", then heading off to the beach with cases of beer to phone parents asking for more money to be wired over to see them through the rest of their stay. On a night out one of the lads comments that "*the girls out here are easy, they're just giving it away for free*".

Both episodes of Season 1 and 2 that focused on Kavos each showed young holidaymakers requiring the attention of a doctor for drink-related injuries. Series 3 Episode 6 showed an ambulance being called for one holidaymaker who was vomiting while lying in the street, and then passed out in the street through drink, and taken back to the medical emergency centre for treatment

Season 3 Episode 6 was introduced by the same initial voiceover as Season 2, focusing on the freedom of such a holiday with friends rather than with parents, but this season also stressed that the episode would take place "*in the carnage and chaos of Kavos*", which is a much stronger and more pejorative phrase than used in previous series set in the same destination. The introductory voiceover goes on to say that: "*The beautiful Greek island of Corfu is the Jewel of the Ionian Sea. It's also home to party town Kavos, rammed with bars and nightclubs, thousands of hedonists descend on its infamous Strip every week, looking for cheap booze, and even cheaper thrills.*"

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The young British tourists the destination attracts are not portrayed in a particularly positive light. In the coach on the way to Kavos from the airport, the 19 year old Essex girl subject of this episode asks her friends “*will there be, like, fish in the sea?*”, she is later seen vomiting in the street on the Strip after drinking. The lads’ group were caught by hotel security urinating on an outside wall of the hotel on their way out to the Strip after drinking 2 bottles of spirits between 4 of them in their rooms. On another day, one of the group is seen throwing the towel he’d used to clean up his vomit from the side of his bed onto another of the hotel’s balconies.

Drinking games also featured in these episodes, and included a hollowed out watermelon filled with 28 shots, drunk by the group members from long straws, a holidaymaker sitting in a chair at a bar and having alcohol poured into him mouth via a large funnel, and large plastic syringes of cocktails being shot straight into holidaymakers’ mouths. The Kavos *Booze Cruise* was featured in each episode of this programme that featured the destination. In Series 2 audiences also saw one of the holidaymakers ingesting laughing gas from a balloon.

### Corfu: A Tale of Two Islands

Although this programme is presented more as a documentary than a reality TV programme, as has already been noted, it is becoming very difficult to tell exactly where the boundaries are between these two genres. In the opening voiceover the audience is told that: “*This is Corfu, a small Greek island in the heart of the Med. In the winter it’s a quiet traditional place, but in summer it’s open for business. Corfu welcomes half a million Brits every year, and just like Britain it’s a land of extremes ... at one end is an exclusive enclave with some of the best luxury villas in the world. At the other is a party paradise where anything goes, then there’s everything in between.*” The focus of this series was ostensibly the Greek economic

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crisis and the effect of this crisis on tourism and the 10,000 or so ex-pats who live on the island, noting that many of these ex-pats also work in the tourism industry.

Kavos features from Episodes 4-8 telling the audience that *“most teenagers that arrive head South to the party town of Kavos, renowned for its nightlife”*. Episode 4 showed Kavos early in the season highlighting a British worker’s difficulty in earning money as a PR (a job that involves encouraging tourists to go to a particular establishment). Similar to *SS&SP*, Episode 5 of *C:TOTI* shows the *“school leavers revelling in their escape from the family holiday”*. In Episode 6, the content featuring Kavos focused on watersports, entertainment workers, large nightclubs, the Kavos drink culture, and young tourists’ poor money management. *“The first package holiday rolled into Kavos in 1982, and since then it’s been a town of excess. For all the freedom on offer there’s also a dark underbelly to the town”*. The content of this programme shows a worker in a large hotel in Kavos, seeing and commenting on the state in which young holidaymakers can leave their rooms.

### What Happens in Kavos

The introductory voiceover to the first season claims that *“Every summer the Greek resort of Kavos attracts a hundred thousand young Brits in the hope of having the time of their lives ... here they escape their parents and the daily grind to party to the point of getting hospitalised. In this series holidaymakers tell us why they’re flocking here in their thousands ... with intimate access to the resort workers ... the tourists and the locals that pick up the pieces ... prepare yourselves for the complete uncensored story about life in a very modern paradise”*.

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Each episode starts with straight-to-camera talking-head comments by those featured in the episode, including comments such as: *“Everyone’s wearing T-shirts saying ‘Kavos fucks Ibiza’”*.

Series 1 Episode 1: *“In tonight’s episode, sex and the fine art of courtship Kavos-style ... life’s consequences are felt in the resort where anything goes and the holidaymakers whose sexual injuries have the doctors baffled”*

*“Until 30 years ago, Kavos on the Greek island of Corfu was just a sleepy fishing village. Then the first tourists arrived ... the promise of sun, sea and sex lures up to 10,000 young Brits a week from all over the United Kingdom and the tourist trade does its best to make sure that they don’t go home disappointed.”*

As with *C:TOTI*, this programme also features the Booze Cruise *“a rite of passage for new arrivals”*, the programme shows drink games and sex simulation games. Within the first 6 minutes of the opening of Series 1 Episode 1, two young female holidaymakers are seen to say to the camera *“there’s just no limits because it’s Kavos”* *“there’s no rules”*. In this episode male holidaymakers stated that their personal grooming regimes had been influenced by other reality TV shows, namely *The Only Way is Essex* and *Geordie Shore*.

In this programme, the *“infamous”*, *“notorious”* Strip is referred to as *“a mile-long partyzone with over 60 bars, restaurants and clubs”*. Holidaymakers refer to seeing others having sex inside clubs, and in the street, one refers to a night where he had a *“threesome on the beach”*.

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The watermelon filled with 7 shots of alcohol per person featured again as it did in *SS&SP*, as did the laughing gas that tourists are encouraged to ingest. There are many doctors surgeries and clinics in the resort. One featured in this programme, the Kavos Emergency Centre *'treats over a thousand young Brits every season'*.

Series 1 Episode 2 focuses on the drinking culture: *"In tonight's episode booze, Kavos-style, we meet the young holidaymakers who come here to party hard on the infamous Strip ... where the bars and clubs compete to get their customers as drunk as possible ... but the heady mix of limitless alcohol, no parents and no rules can have serious consequences"*.

Kavos Emergencies is described as charging 70 Euros per visit, with the staff perceiving Kavos as being like a *"warzone"*. Holidaymakers and doctors are seen discussing their beliefs that their drinks may have been spiked. The episode also featured people receiving medical treatment for falls, cuts, injuries through fights and through random acts of violence, and features the cheaply priced *"Headfucker"* pint sized cocktail, *"often followed by a laughing gas chaser"*.

The programme does not only focus on the behaviour of holidaymakers, audiences are also informed that some of the younger Kavos workers are also abroad without their parents for the first time. As the voiceover regarding their behaviour and the aftermath of the wild nights out state: *"it's a clash of cultures and generations"*.

Series 1 Episode 3 – then looks at the behaviour of the young workers *"the British youngsters who spend a summer working here"*, which the workers refer to as *"getting laid and getting paid"*. In this episode, focus was particularly on the bar PR workers, and considers the low

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pay and cost of medical treatment, and cost of not being able to go to work if individuals are injured. This episode also shows tattooists tattooing drunk holidaymakers

Series 2 similarly focuses on negative portrayals of the young British tourists the resort attracts: *“What language do they speak here, is it Greek, I think?”*

Series 2 Episode 1 – focuses on exploring *“the unique drinking culture of Kavos and its consequences”*. The introductory voiceover again focusing on what has happened to this destination since the influx of the type of tourist it attracts: *“Kavos, once a sleepy fishing village on the south coast of Corfu, until the Brits arrived, transforming it into a Mecca for young holidaymakers intent on losing control”*. One of the young holidaymakers shown in this episode on his first ever lads holiday, away from parents sees the holiday as offering *“such a sense of freedom, no restrictions”*.

Series 2 Episode 2 – then focuses on *“the girls who come to Kavos to party hard”*.

Series 2 Episode 3 – focuses on those who have come to Kavos for the first time, for their first parent-free holiday away with their friends. However, unlike *SS&SP*, there is no final confrontation with parents who have indeed followed their offspring to the resort and witnessed their behaviour.

### Summary

In summary, it can be seen that three main themes arose from our qualitative thematic analysis of each episode of these four reality television programmes, and these themes were common across all of the programmes. A holiday to Kavos, where a young person

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experiences the freedom of not being accompanied by parents, but instead is accompanied by friends of his or her own age is seen as a *right of passage*. It is this freedom of no longer being under the watchful eye of parents that facilitates the young British holidaymaker to indulge in risky behaviours and excessive consumption, while adopting the view (gained from their own viewing of such programmes) that in Kavos, *anything goes*. Yet it is not only the young British holidaymaker that is seen behaving badly in these programmes, the young tourism workers may also be abroad on their own for the first time, and similarly indulge in the temptations and excesses of the resort, particularly casual sex, which they refer to as *getting laid and getting paid*.

### *Right of passage*

All four of these Reality Television programmes focused on typical Kavos tourists as “*school leavers revelling in their escape from the family holiday*” (C:TOTI, Ep 5), arriving in large numbers – “*10,000 young Brits a week from all over the United Kingdom*” (WHIK, S1 Ep1). Activities such as the Kavos Booze Cruise are also seen in-resort as “*a rite of passage for new arrivals*” (WHIK, S1 Ep1).

### *Anything goes*

The behaviour of these young British holidaymakers is typified as “*no rules*” and “*anything goes*”. Most of the focus of the programmes was on nighttime activities which mainly focus on the consumption of cheap alcohol (heavily featuring shots and cocktails in bars and night-clubs); intentional drug taking (particularly the ingesting of Laughing Gas through a balloon); unintentional drug taking (drinks having been ‘spiked’); drinking games (including those that simulate sex acts); and sexual activity; with a limited focus on daytime activities such as the Kavos Booze Cruise, watersport activities, go-kart racing, Zorbing etc. The media also

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showed young people choosing to get tattooed while in Kavos, and tattooists undertaking this even when their clients were intoxicated. Other than organised trips that take place on the water, or in visits to the Aqualand waterpark, most of the tourists' bad behaviour is seen to take place on the “*infamous*”, “*notorious*” Strip, “*a mile-long partyzone with over 60 bars, restaurants and clubs*” (WHIK, S1 Ep1). Tourists are also shown using local emergency medical services often for drink-related issues (a big feature of each episode of WHIK). One issue that was touched upon in WHIK is the cost of such medical treatment (70 Euros per visit before paying for any additional treatment).

### *Getting laid and getting paid*

The tourism workers are also seen indulging in similar bad behaviours as the young tourists, focusing on alcohol consumption, sexual activity, and the need to use the services of medical facilities. WHIK (S1 Ep 3) showed the behaviour of the young workers “*the British youngsters who spend a summer working here*”, which the workers refer to as “*getting laid and getting paid*”.

## **Discussion**

The image of Kavos as a destination, as shown in these reality television programmes focuses, in the main, on the young British holidaymakers, abroad with their friends on their first holiday away from their parents. These tourists are seen to be indulging in the Kavos holiday experience as a means of escape from their everyday lives (Williams & Lew, 2015), acting in ways that they would otherwise not have the time to do, or have too much parental supervision to do (Konstantinos, 2010; Wang, 1999). However, the sensationalised nature of this type of television programme focuses on only a few of the 10,000 young holidaymakers who visit the resort every week during the height of the season. Thus, how much the



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behaviour of the young people shown in these programmes is indeed a departure from their normal behaviour (Williams & Lew, 2015) is difficult to assess, as is how typical is this behaviour for the majority of Kavos tourists.

In the main, these programmes neglected to consider Kavos as a tourism destination by the families and older couples who holiday in the resort in the shoulder months. The main exception to this was *C:TOTI*, and this programme appeared to be leaning more towards documentary than ‘fly-on-the-wall’ reality TV of the more sensationalist type, but it is recognised that the boundaries between these genres are becoming blurred (Dunn, 2005; Nabi *et al* 2003) and it is becoming increasingly difficult for audiences to evaluate which media portrayals are indeed authentic and which simulated to increase entertainment values (Rose & Wood, 2005).

Thus these programmes were highly unbalanced in their portrayal of the changing patterns of tourism in the resort of Kavos over different periods of the year, and by the various different groups of actors in the destination conceptualisation process. A focus on specific types and patterns of particularly bad tourist behaviour could lead an audience to believe this particular aspect of behaviour is not only typical, but is the only type of tourist behaviour, thus leading to a skewed image of the destination that is not only portrayed unfavourably, but that is very much at odds with the reality of the place, at least for nine months of the year. While, on the one hand, this may lead the moral majority to perceive the destination image of Kavos as negative, and thus lead them to avoid holidaying there (Hyounggon & Richardson, 2003; Iwashita, 2006; Lawson & Baud-Bovy 1977; Mayo 1973), on the other hand, it may strengthen a positive perception of the destination image of Kavos as a place for potential

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tourists who want exactly the type of holiday portrayed in these programmes (Iwashita, 2003).

As far as its portrayal in these Reality Television programmes is concerned, the entire resort of Kavos has almost been reduced to the space of a one-mile Strip of bars and nightclubs.

There are far more complexities to the place of Kavos than shown in TV reality programme, yet they continue to focus on the behaviour of some young holidaymakers who believe it is perfectly acceptable to trash their accommodation because they have not only seen it happen on TV, but because such programmes continue to strengthen the belief in Kavos as a destination with no rules and where anything goes.

## **Conclusion**

Our focus on the way media can influence the image of a destination in negative ways is contributing to a very under-developed area in the literature on media-induced tourism (Beeton, 2005; Busby & Klug, 2001; Hudson & Ritchie, 2006; Skinner, 2016; Spears *et al*, 2012) in general, and on the effect of reality television in particular. This therefore is our key theoretical contribution, to continue and further contribute to the development of theoretical understanding about the relationship between reality television as a form of popular culture, and destination image, particularly with regard to portrayals of popular tourist destinations that has so far been previously lacking in the literature.

Unlike other forms of televisual media, reality television tends to be sensationalist and courts controversy. However, unlike scripted fictional drama that does not purport to show the 'real', or documentary that does claim to portray the 'real', while to at least some extent disguising editorial input, reality television purports to display reality, yet while it is often

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staged and controversial behaviours are encouraged by the production team, such television is perceived as reality by its audiences. Reality television also tends, at least to some extent, to portray its participants and their activities in an unfavourable light. In the case of reality television programmes such as these focusing on tourism in Kavos, portrayals of tourists behaving badly not only has the potential to affect audience perceptions of the tourists themselves, but also has the potential to affect audience perceptions of the destination that provides the location for their activities. Thus, reality television does appear to display characteristics not associated with other visual media associated with tourism, making it a suitable medium of separate academic enquiry. The phenomenon of reality television has to date been under-researched. This paper makes the first explorative small scale qualitative enquiry into this phenomenon.

It is worth noting the limitations of this study. We recognise that highly qualitative research such as this will always draw negative claims of its subjectivity, and acknowledge with no little degree of frustration that ‘there is still ... a lack of consensus on how to establish the legitimacy of visual tourism studies that draw on qualitative approaches’ (Chambers, 2012:39). However, we also believe that this research has value and will justify its legitimacy based on two main arguments: firstly that we are researching a relatively new and under-researched phenomenon, thus it is explorative and such small-scale qualitative methods can be seen to be appropriate to exploratory enquiry; and, secondly that we are researching a phenomenon that is already highly subjective, and thus a subjective approach to its analysis could be seen to be more consistent than making an attempt to objectively analyse such a phenomenon from a positivist paradigm. Indeed, ‘classic attempts to take subjective data and organize them into some sort of systematic social scientific account have been seriously

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challenged on the grounds that they are imposing some kind of hierarchical order on the accounts of the participants themselves' (Gilhespy & Harris, 2011:63-64).

Our research also focused on only one destination and thus the generalisability of findings may be limited, however, the visual media portrayal of other such party destinations is very similar. Moreover, each of these party destinations are located in places that offer many other types of tourism product to different target markets, each of which may find particular destination spaces contested by a range of stakeholders.

If the recommendation in the literature on negative place identities is to be followed, Kavos should do everything it can to overcome the potential for the formation and perpetuation of a negative image (Bastakis *et al*, 2004; Kamenidou *et al*, 2013). The perception of the place in a 'negative' light is based on consumption behaviour by a specific target market segment for only three months of the year. The rest of the time it reverts to the normal way of life for many Greek coastal island resorts. Those local people that own businesses in the resort rely upon tourism for their income, and appear to enjoy the benefits it reaps. Should Kavos, and other party resorts move to a more up-market demographic, this would simply push such types of tourism to other places, and require an amount of infrastructure investment that can ill be afforded.

What really happens in Kavos is not only what is portrayed in the media. The reality televisual media portrayal of the destination image of Kavos focuses on only one narrow segment of young British high-season tourists, and is therefore highly unbalanced and not only neglects the changing patterns of tourism during different periods of the year, but also neglects various different groups of stakeholders in the destination image formation process,

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leading to a skewed perceived image of the destination that is not only negative, but very much at odds with the reality of the place, at least for nine months of the year. This leads to some tourists staying away because either they believe nothing is open to serve them in the shoulder months, or because they do not perceive they 'fit' with the stereotypical tourist shown in these programmes. Many of the tourist behaviours shown in these programmes are classed as risky, and can be perceived as negative by those other than the young partying target market.

Televisual media content is known to be able to affect destination image, and such content is now more easily accessible across a range of platforms, including the internet, which itself is being more heavily used by potential tourists to make decisions about destinations. Reality television programmes are increasingly deemed by many audiences to help in their quest for authenticity, because, even when known to be staged in some way, such programmes are indeed deemed to offer a more real portrayal of the people and places they inhabit than other more traditional forms of fictionalised drama or scripted documentary.

This type of visual media portrayal about places is one that should be more thoroughly researched. Further research could consider other destinations in order to ascertain if different types of reality television portrayals project different destination images. Future studies could also fruitfully focus on the way a wider range of destination images portrayed in reality television programmes are perceived by various audiences, including other online and offline media, and by potential tourists themselves.

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